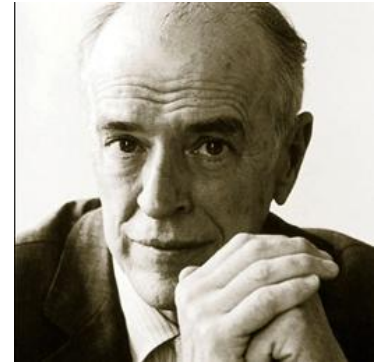


Reading Group Discussion Questions--So Long, See You Tomorrow

1. This memoir is a futile way of making amends. What does the narrator so desperately want to make amends for? Do you feel his guilt is justified? What does the incident in the school corridor tell us about him?
2. How would you describe the narrator? What kind of effect does the loss of his mother have on him, and on his father? How would you describe the relationship between the narrator and his father? How important is the father's inability to talk about the loss of his wife?
3. Are there parallels between the narrator's story and the story he reconstructs for Cletus? How important is Cletus to him and why? What effect do the tragic events in his family have upon Cletus?
4. How would you describe Clarence's relationship with Lloyd before Lloyd begins his affair with Fern? Why does Clarence shoot Lloyd—is it simply because Lloyd is sleeping with Fern, or are the reasons more complex?
5. How would you describe the societies of both 1920s Lincoln and Chicago? Which better suits the narrator and why?
6. "In any case, in talking about the past we lie with every breath we draw." What do you think Maxwell means by this statement? What is its significance in the context of a novel whose narrator is recalling events which took place fifty years ago? The narrative is refracted through the narrator's adult experience. How is this likely to have changed his interpretation?
7. The loss of a mother is a recurring theme in Maxwell's fiction—he lost his own mother in the 1918 influenza epidemic, as did the narrator. How useful do you find knowledge of an author's life in analyzing their fiction?
8. "In the palace at 4 am you walk from one room to the next by going through walls. . . It is there that I find Cletus Smith." What does the narrator mean by this? How have the sad events of his adolescence affected his adult life? How different is he as an adult from the troubled child of the 1920s?
9. How would you describe the marriages of Marie and Lloyd, and Fern and Clarence? What were expectations of marriage likely to be in 1920s Lincoln? Do you think Fern's hope of happiness with Lloyd is realistic?
10. Why do you think Maxwell chose to write much of the penultimate chapter from the point of view of Trixie, Cletus' dog? What effect does it have?

William Maxwell

Maxwell was born in Lincoln, Illinois, and as a child, he survived the 1918 Influenza epidemic. He attended the University of Illinois and Harvard University. He was best known as the fiction editor of *The New Yorker* magazine for forty years (1936-1975), where he worked with writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, John Updike, J.D. Salinger, John Cheever, Mavis Gallant, Frank O'Connor, Larry Woiwode, John O'Hara, Eudora Welty, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. As an editor Welty wrote of him: "For fiction writers, he was the headquarters."



He also wrote six highly acclaimed novels, a number of short stories and essays, children's stories, and a memoir, *Ancestors* (1972). His award-winning fiction, which is increasingly seen as some of the most important of the 20th Century, has recurring themes of childhood, family, loss and lives changed quietly and irreparably. Much of his work is autobiographical, particularly concerning the loss of his mother when he was 10 years old growing up in the rural Midwest of America and the house where he lived at the time, which he referred to as the "Wunderkammer" or "Chamber of Wonders". He wrote of his loss "It happened too suddenly, with no warning, and we none of us could believe it or bear it... the beautiful, imaginative, protected world of my childhood swept away."

Since his death in 2000 several works of biography have appeared, including *A William Maxwell Portrait: Memories and Appreciations* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), *My Mentor: A Young Man's Friendship with William Maxwell* by Alec Wilkinson (Houghton-Mifflin, 2002), and *William Maxwell: A Literary Life* by Barbara Burkhardt (University of Illinois Press, 2005).

In 2008 the Library of America published the first of two collections of William Maxwell, *Early Novels and Stories*, Christopher Carduff editor. His collected edition of William Maxwell's fiction, published to mark the writer's centenary, was completed by a second volume, *Later Novels and Stories* in the fall of 2008.

William Maxwell was married to the former Emily Gilman Noyes of Portland, Oregon. They had two daughters, Katherine and Emily. (via Wikipedia)

Novels

Bright Center of Heaven (1934)

They Came Like Swallows (1937)

The Folded Leaf (1945)

Time Will Darken It (1948)

The Chateau (1961)

So Long, See You Tomorrow (1980)

Short story collections

Stories (1956)

The Old Man and the Railroad Crossing and Other Tales (1966)

Over By the River, and Other Stories (1977)

Five Tales (1988)

Billie Dyer and Other Stories (1992)